

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

23rd JULY 2003

A303 STONEHENGE IMPROVEMENT

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members about recent developments concerning the A303 Stonehenge Improvement and to seek approval for the publication of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) prohibiting motorised vehicular traffic on the A344 and on byways within the World Heritage Site on completion of the Trunk Road scheme.

Background

2. The A303 through the World Heritage Site and past Stonehenge itself is the first single carriageway section that drivers encounter after leaving London. The monument suffers from A303 traffic only 150 metres away and worse intrusion from the A344 which virtually touches it. The proposed tunnel would hide the A303 and its traffic from view and would allow Stonehenge to be restored to its prehistoric setting.
3. Residents of Winterbourne Stoke suffer from the A303 running through the village. Over 22,000 vehicles, on average, travel along the road each day and this is more than a single carriageway can cope with satisfactorily. Traffic congestion, principally at the weekends in Summer when the traffic often comes to a standstill, is the result and there are accident blackspots on the approaches to Winterbourne Stoke and at the junction of the A303 with the A344 at Stonehenge Bottom.
4. At its meeting on 24th February 1999, the Environment and Transport Committee considered a report on the A303 and the Stonehenge Master Plan and resolved to:-
 - (i) *Note the current position.*
 - (ii) *Support the provision of a 2km cut and cover tunnel for the A303 past Stonehenge.*
 - (iii) *Support the closure of the A344 County Road at the time of commencement of work on the eastbound tunnel and seek the most appropriate alterations of other rights of way affected by the restoration of the landscape.*
 - (iv) *Stress the importance to the Highways Agency to include the grade separation of the A345/A303 interchange at Countess Roundabout in the overall scheme.*
 - (v) *Express concern at the difference in the timescale proposed for the provision of the visitor centre and the grade separation of the A345/A303 interchange at Countess Roundabout, and to seek details on the interim traffic solutions.*

5. The Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan Consultation Draft was considered by the Environment and Transport Committee on 3rd November 1999. It was resolved inter alia:-
 - (i) *... that there is general agreement with the principles of managing the area in such a way as to improve the downland setting of the Stones and other archaeological features ...*
 - (iv) *To assist in measures to control access by motorised vehicles on byways within the World Heritage Site*
6. In the intervening period intensive scheme development work by the Highways Agency and its consultants has continued and the current proposals now include a 2.1km long bored tunnel rather than the 2km cut and cover tunnel previously put forward. This means that it will not be necessary to close the A344 until the whole of the tunnel works are completed and the new road opened.
7. The Highways Agency announced in July 2000 that a flyover at the Countess Roundabout was the preferred solution for coping with present-day congestion, improving safety and assisting with traffic generated by planned developments nearby including the new Visitor Centre for Stonehenge. The grade separation of the junction is an integral part of the scheme and Heritage Lottery Funding for the Visitor Centre is contingent upon the junction improvement going ahead. There will therefore be no need for an interim solution.

The Current Position

8. On 5th June 2003, the Highways Agency published the Draft Orders for the Trunk Road scheme, which is being promoted as an 'exceptional environmental scheme' in recognition of its unique context. The Orders provide for the dualling of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down and removal of the route from the sight of Stonehenge by creating a 2.1km long bored tunnel. Winterbourne Stoke would be relieved of heavy trunk road traffic with the provision of a bypass and there would be grade-separated junctions at Countess Roundabout and at Longbarrow Crossroads.

Scheme Description

9. The scheme (shown on the plan at **Appendix 1**) would run eastwards from the end of the existing dual carriageway at Berwick Down and then swing to the north-east to bypass Winterbourne Stoke. At this point a junction would be provided to give access to the village from the west. The route would pass under the B3083 Shrewton Road, which would be re-aligned slightly to the east to allow construction of the overbridge off-line. There is no junction between the A303 and the Shrewton Road proposed at this point. The route would continue across the River Till on a 200 metre long viaduct and the road would then climb out of the valley passing under a new bridleway bridge.
10. At Longbarrow Crossroads there would be a new twin-roundabout junction with the route passing under the A360 in a cutting. A further roundabout just to the west on the old A303 would provide access to Winterbourne Stoke from the east. From Longbarrow Crossroads the route would run in a cutting on the south side of the existing road for about 1.5km before heading into the tunnel.

11. The tunnel would have twin bores and would run in a gentle curve for 2.1km before emerging east of King Barrow Ridge. Both tunnel portals would be out of sight of Stonehenge. At present, westbound traffic from Stonehenge Road can join the A303 via a slip road just to the east of King Barrow Ridge. This would not be possible once the tunnel is built because of the close proximity of the tunnel portal to the slip road. Stonehenge Road would become a cul-de-sac for motorised vehicles but would provide access for agricultural and emergency vehicles, to the proposed tunnel control building near the eastern tunnel portal and to Stonehenge Cottages.
12. Between Longbarrow Crossroads and King Barrow Ridge a new byway would be created on the line of the existing A303 to provide an alternative route for non-motorised users who would be prohibited from using the tunnel. The byway would connect to Stonehenge Road near King Barrow Ridge and provide a link to other rights of way in the area. A draft TRO prohibiting its use by motorised vehicles is included in the Highways Agency's draft Orders applying to the scheme. It is anticipated that this Order will be published by the end of July.
13. From King Barrow Ridge the route would follow the existing dual carriageway to Countess Roundabout where the A303 would be carried over the roundabout on an embankment and two new bridges. The existing layout would be retained underneath with the addition of traffic signals. The route would then rejoin the existing A303 before the bridge over the River Avon.
14. The period for objections to the Draft Orders expires on 4th September 2003. If there are objections to the scheme a Public Inquiry will follow, probably in Spring 2004. Construction could start in 2005 and would take three and a half years.

Diversion Route for Tunnel

15. Routine maintenance of mechanical and electrical equipment and tunnel cleaning would be required on a monthly basis. For safety reasons, these operations could not be carried out adjacent to live traffic and it would be necessary for one tunnel bore to be closed at a time while the other bore is kept open for traffic in the opposite direction. It is anticipated that each tunnel bore would need to be closed for a 6-hour night-time period. A contra flow system in the opposite bore would be unsafe and could affect the operation of the tunnel ventilation system. These routine closures would be programmed to take place overnight between 23.00 and 05.00 mid-week to coincide with the lowest predicted traffic flows. Individual tunnel bores would be closed on consecutive nights.
16. Diversion routes would operate at two levels; a regional system to take traffic off the A303 well before the tunnel and a local diversion to take any remaining traffic. For longer distance traffic, a wider diversion route would be advised via the M4 and M5 and this would be combined with other routes such as the A36 and A338. The route of the local diversion has been discussed with the Highways Agency and the Police and only one feasible route has been identified. For westbound traffic the diversion would be via the A345 north from Countess Roundabout, west along The Packway through Larkhill to its junction with the B3086, then south to Airman's Corner and Longbarrow Crossroads via the B3086 and A360. The eastbound diversion would be the reverse of this.

17. The Highways Agency estimates that the total volume of traffic that would otherwise use the A303 over the 6-hour night-time period, taking no account of the traffic that would use the regional diversion, would be 1,120 vehicles in 2008 using high growth traffic forecasts. The effect of the regional diversion would be to reduce the flow on the local diversion by about 35%. The impact on local residents of the additional traffic noise generated along the diversion route would be significant but there is not a more suitable alternative route available.
18. Major maintenance such as resurfacing and replacement of ventilation fans would be undertaken as additional phased activities during monthly planned tunnel maintenance. Tunnel incidents such as vehicle accidents and breakdowns have been considered in the development of operational procedures for the tunnel and the emergency response would match the severity of the incident.
19. The traffic flows predicted on the diversion route during the routine maintenance closures of the tunnel are relatively light. However, the volume of diverted traffic during a tunnel incident would be much higher and while it is to be hoped that such incidents would be infrequent, the diversion route must be capable of safely carrying the diverted traffic.
20. The structural condition of the carriageway along the diversion route would be assessed prior to the completion of the scheme. In the meantime, it is proposed that a commitment should be sought from the Highways Agency that it would include any necessary work in the trunk road contract to bring the condition of the carriageway up to a suitable condition. In view of the frequency and impact on local residents of routine maintenance operations, this should include resurfacing Countess Road with a low-noise wearing course. The Packway through Larkhill was resurfaced with low-noise material in 2001.

The A344

21. The Side Roads Order (SRO) provides for the A344 to be stopped up from its junction with the A303 at Stonehenge Bottom as far as Amesbury Byway 12 immediately west of the existing Visitor Centre car park. This section of carriageway would otherwise become a cul-de-sac once the tunnel was built. It would be replaced by a footpath.
22. Consideration has been given to the most appropriate treatment for the remaining length of the A344, from Byway 12 to Airman's Corner. It is proposed that the County Council should make a TRO prohibiting motorised vehicles. There would be exemptions for permit holders to allow access for agricultural vehicles, for security staff at Stonehenge itself, for the emergency services to gain access should the need arise and possibly access for vehicles carrying disabled visitors. Permits would be authorised by the County Council.
23. The TRO would come into effect when the A344 ceases to carry County Road traffic. That would be at the time the tunnel and the rest of the trunk road scheme is opened, programmed for 2008. Once a TRO is made, it must be put into effect within two years so it would not be appropriate to make the Order at present.

24. However, the question of how the A344 closure is to be put into effect is likely to arise at the Public Inquiry into the Highways Agency's scheme and the Inquiry Inspector will need evidence of the County Council's intentions. It is therefore proposed that Members of the Regulatory Committee formally indicate their intention to advertise a draft TRO prohibiting motorised vehicles on the A344, with a number of exemptions, subject to the confirmation of the Trunk Road Orders.
25. The physical treatment of the carriageway of the A344 will be covered by the planning application for the proposed Stonehenge Visitor Centre and arrangements for access to the World Heritage Site which is expected to be submitted by English Heritage to Salisbury District Council later this year.

Airman's Corner and Rollestone Crossroads

26. The junction between the A344, A360 and B3086 at Airman's Corner has a poor accident record which would justify significant expenditure by the County Council on remedial measures. However, the junction layout would need to be revised once the TRO on the A344 came into effect to reflect the change in priority and also to take account of its inclusion as part of the tunnel diversion route. Members might feel that the County Council should not bear all the costs of the junction modifications and that a cost sharing arrangement between the County Council and the Highways Agency would be appropriate.
27. This is also true to a lesser extent of the B3086 junction with The Packway at Rollestone Crossroads which also has a poor accident record considering the relatively low volume of traffic. A preliminary assessment would suggest that a roundabout would be the most appropriate form of junction at both locations. Suitable designs will be prepared to identify the need for any additional land outside the existing highway boundary and likely costs estimated so that these can be taken into account in discussions with the Highways Agency.

Byways within the World Heritage Site

28. The existing rights of way network is shown on the plans at **Appendix 2**. There are currently two byway routes within the World Heritage Site. Wilsford-cum-Lake 1 (WCL1 - **Appendix 2**)/Amesbury 12 (A12 - **Appendix 2**) runs from Druid's Lodge on the A360 in a north easterly direction to Larkhill, crossing the A303 and the A344 to the west of Stonehenge and Wilsford-cum-Lake 2 (WCL2 - **Appendix 2**) which runs from the Woodford Valley to the parish boundary with Amesbury, south of Stonehenge. Beyond the parish boundary the route continues as far as the A303 as Amesbury Bridleway 11 (A11 - **Appendix 2**).
29. The status of the latter route was the subject of two Public Inquiries in 1975 and 1982. The Inspectors at both Inquiries agreed that vehicular rights existed over the whole route but on a technicality, only the section of the way within Wilsford was reclassified as a byway. In order to avoid the status of Amesbury Bridleway 11 becoming an issue at the Inquiry into the Highways Agency's proposals and avoid criticism of the County Council for not having resolved the issue, a Modification Order has been advertised changing the recorded status of the way to byway. It is likely that this will lead to a Public Inquiry in the Autumn and enable the status of the way to be confirmed in advance of the A303 Inquiry.

30. In order to secure the aims and objectives of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan and enhance the historic environment, it will be necessary to control access by motorised vehicles on the byways within the World Heritage Site. It is proposed that, as with the A344, TROs should be made prohibiting the use of the byways by motorised vehicles with exceptions for agricultural access and essential maintenance. Access for horses, horse-drawn vehicles, walkers and cyclists would be unaffected.

Remainder of the Rights of Way Network

31. At the western end of the scheme, between Berwick Down and Longbarrow Crossroads, there are four rights of way affected. From west to east, Berwick St James Bridleway 3 (BJ3 - **Appendix 3**), which currently connects to the A303 near the end of the existing dual carriageway, will no longer have a connection with the trunk road but will be linked to the old road with a new section of bridleway.
32. Winterbourne Stoke Footpath 3 (WS3 - **Appendix 3**) runs from a point opposite the B3083 Berwick Road northwards to the B3083 Shrewton Road. The SRO provides for its extension at the northern end to reconnect to the new section of B3083 which will run just to the east of the existing road to allow the bridge over the bypass to be constructed off-line.
33. Winterbourne Stoke Bridleway 4 (WS4 - **Appendix 3**) runs northwards from the A303 in the middle of the village. Its route will be diverted slightly eastwards where it meets the bypass to pass under the River Till viaduct.
34. Winterbourne Stoke Bridleway 6B (WS6B - **Appendix 3**) runs northwards from the A303 opposite the minor road to Hill Farm. A bridge will be provided to carry the right of way over the bypass. To avoid an expensive skewed crossing of the bypass, the SRO provides for the bridleway to be diverted locally to cross at right angles.
35. Evidence has been brought to the attention of the County Council suggesting that all four of these rights of way are incorrectly recorded on the Definitive Map of Rights of Way and should be recorded as Byways Open to All Traffic. The evidence is being investigated and it would appear that Definitive Map Modification Orders should be published to correctly record the status of these ways.

Main Considerations for the Council

36. The County Council has previously resolved to support the closure of the A344 and appropriate alterations to other rights of way affected by the restoration of the Stonehenge landscape. It is proposed that draft TROs prohibiting motorised vehicles, with certain exceptions, should be advertised within two years of the date they will be required to come into effect.
37. The diversion route for eastbound A344 traffic would be via the A360 south to Longbarrow Crossroads and then eastwards on the A303 through the tunnel to Countess Roundabout. The reverse would apply for westbound traffic.

38. For northbound vehicles on Byway Wilsford-cum-Lake 1/Amesbury 12, the diversion would run northwards on the A360 and B3086 from Druids Lodge via Longbarrow Crossroads and Airman's Corner to Rollestone Crossroads and then eastwards on The Packway and vice versa for southbound vehicles.
39. Should Bridleway Amesbury 11 be reclassified as a Byway to continue the cul-de-sac Byway Wilsford-cum-Lake 2 as far as the line of the A303, the diversion route would be via a short length of unclassified County Road and the County Road C42 to Stonehenge Road and then northward to the proposed tunnel top byway and vice versa. If the bridleway is not reclassified as a byway, Byway Wilsford-cum-Lake 2 would remain a cul-de-sac and a diversion route would not be required.
40. It will be necessary for the County Council to indicate at the Public Inquiry into the trunk road proposals how the A344 and byways within the World Heritage Site will be closed to motorised vehicles. The Committee is therefore asked formally to agree to the advertisement of TROs within two years of the completion of construction of the A303 Stonehenge Improvement.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

41. A full Environmental Impact Assessment accompanied the publication of the scheme Orders. Major benefits of the scheme in environmental terms are the restoration of the setting of Stonehenge and the removal of traffic from Winterbourne Stoke. The closure of the A344 and byways within the World Heritage Site to motorised vehicles is a major contribution to achieving the former aim.
42. The impact of the scheme on the rights of way network would be beneficial for walkers, horseriders and cyclists. The removal of severance from a number of rights of way, the provision of a new route along the line of the old A303 and the improvement in amenity through placing the trunk road in a tunnel would make the area much more attractive to those user groups. There would be some loss of amenity for users of motorised vehicles who would be prohibited from using the old A344 and the byways. The changes would lead generally to a greater degree of access to the open countryside and wider archaeological landscape around Stonehenge.

Risk Assessment

43. Once the intention to make the TROs was advertised, it is likely that there would be objections. In those circumstances, the County Council may hold a Public Inquiry but it is not obliged to do so. If there was a significant weight of objections and the County Council decided not to hold an Inquiry, objectors could make an application for judicial review.

Financial Implications

44. If it were decided that an Inquiry should be held, the costs would fall on the County Council. It is difficult to forecast what these might be because it would depend on the number of objections and the length of the Inquiry. If it were decided not to hold an Inquiry and a subsequent judicial review found against the County Council, the legal costs could fall on the County Council.

Options Considered

45. The County Council is committed to the closure of the A344 and the byways within the World Heritage Site to motorised vehicles. Alternative ways of achieving this have been considered including the use of powers under the Highways Act 1980 and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 but legal advice is that the most appropriate approach would be a TRO under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Reason for Recommendation

46. The Highways Agency has included the closure of part of the A344 within the SRO for the A303 Stonehenge Improvement but cannot include the remaining section between Airman's Corner and Byway 12 and has no jurisdiction over byways other than the tunnel top route created by the SRO. It therefore falls to the County Council to use the powers available to it as local highway authority.

Recommendation

47. That:-
- (i) The Traffic Regulation Orders under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 prohibiting motorised vehicles from using the A344 between Airman's Corner and Byway Amesbury 12 and Byways within the World Heritage Site be advertised subject to confirmation of the A303 Stonehenge Improvement Scheme Orders;
 - (ii) A commitment be sought from the Highways Agency that it will contribute to the cost of any necessary repairs to bring the condition of the tunnel diversion route up to a suitable standard and also contribute to the costs of junction improvements on the route.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None